

988 in Delaware

Briefing for 911/PSAP/Police/EMS Stakeholders

As part of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, 988 will be the new three-digit dialing code connecting those in mental health crisis through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). By July 16, 2022, the current NSPL will be accessible by dialing 9-8-8 from any phone in the U.S. To prepare for 988, Delaware is adding a second NSPL center to the network to support a demand increase. 911 leaders are actively engaged in the 988 planning and implementation process. Co-creating a referral process between 988 and 911 is an important next step.

HIGHLIGHTS

- There is no immediate change to 911 or any other existing crisis lines
- Nationwide, the first year (2022-2023) will focus on capacity building, data collection and coordination with 911/first responders
- By the end of 2022, DE will have a second Lifeline center to support an increased call volume

What does the 988 initiative mean for 911/law enforcement/EMS?

988 and 911 are designed to be complementary. Ongoing collaborations between 988 and 911 will help those in crisis receive timely and appropriate help with options like mobile mental health services - instead of law enforcement response. 988 should decrease community reliance on LEO for mental-health related calls and transport, and it should eliminate LEO delays due to the admissions process.

What is Delaware's plan to get ready for 988 and what does it mean for law enforcement?

Our vision is to establish a statewide Behavioral Health Crisis Communication Center as a hub for behavioral health crisis response that works closely with 911. Delaware's multi-disciplinary 988 Planning Coalition proposes expanding our statewide capacity to strengthen coordination in three phases. The approach focuses on achieving an in-state answer rate above 90% in the first year.

2021 - 2022

PRE-LAUNCH PLANNING

- Support existing center (Contact Lifeline)
- Add CIS as backup Lifeline Center
- Secure Funding

2022 - 2023

YEAR 1 - SOFT LAUNCH

- Expand capacity
- Coordination
- Technology
- Gather Data
- Partner with 911

After 2023

2024 AND BEYOND

- Statewide Behavioral Health Crisis Communication Center

DE 911/LAW ENFORCEMENT/EMS IMPACT

No change for law enforcement (community will still call pre-existing resources).

Now - July 2022

No change for law enforcement. 988 will be routed to ContactLifeline. Overflow calls go to DSAMH Crisis Intervention Services.

July 2022 - July 2023

Explore referral and handoff procedures to law enforcement and EMS. 988 planning coalition will be the liaison for any changes.

After 2023



How is 988 different from 911?

988 was established to support people experiencing mental health and suicidal crises. As such, 988 aims to provide better access to the Lifeline network and crisis resources. This is distinct from the public safety scope of 911. While the numbers sound similar, 988 and 911 serve individuals in three distinctive ways: limited dispatch, longer interaction, and follow-ups.

911	988
911 is a nationally known number to receive emergency calls and send first responders for fire, ambulance, and police responses.	The new 988 number connects individuals who are in a mental health crisis with a trained mental health counselor to de-escalate a situation.
911 operator takes the call and dispatches police, fire, or ambulance within seconds.	The majority of 988 calls are resolved by phone/text/chat. Only 5-10% of calls require dispatching a mobile crisis team.
A typical 911 call lasts less than a minute.	A typical 988 call lasts about 16 minutes.
No required follow-up post-incident.	Individuals with elevated risk for suicide can consent to a follow-up call within 24-72 hours with a crisis counselor to discuss next steps and resources.

What happens when you call 988?

Dialing 988 will connect individuals to professionals trained to answer mental health and substance use emergencies, 24/7. Like the current 1-800 NSPL number, pressing “1” will route the caller to the Veterans Crisis Line, pressing “2” routes to the Spanish language line. Remaining on the line directs callers to the local crisis call center. Those with a Delaware number will be routed to Delaware’s Lifeline center - ContactLifeline. While local crisis centers are best to support people in-state, if a Delaware-based center is unavailable, calls will direct to the national backup network.

Will geolocation be enacted?

Unlike 911, which uses geolocation, the Lifeline Network currently routes calls based on the area code. The Lifeline provides immediate assistance, yet telecommunication providers are unable to offer accurate caller location at this time. The Federal Communications Commission is currently working with several federal entities on resolving issues, including a recommendation to Congress and a forum in May 2022 to examine the opportunities and challenges.

Who will answer 988 in Delaware?

Delaware currently has one Lifeline Center, ContactLifeline, that will answer the 988 calls from Delaware callers. Crisis Intervention Services (CIS) under the Division of Substance Abuse & Mental Health (DSAMH) is in progress to gain accreditation to become Delaware’s a backup Lifeline center to start taking overflow calls by the end of 2022.

Will Delaware’s existing crisis hotlines go away?

No. There are no closed doors when it comes to serving individuals in crisis. All numbers below will continue to operate:

Adult Crisis Intervention Services: 1-800-652-2929 (NCC); 1-800-345-6785 (Kent/Sussex)

Youth Crisis Support: 1-800-969-4357

Crisis Text Line: Text DE to 741-741

ContactLifeline (NSPL): 1-800-262-9800 or 988

Will 988 calls be referred to 911?

Currently, a small percentage of Lifeline calls require activation of the 911 system when there is an imminent risk to someone’s life that cannot be reduced during the Lifeline call. In these cases, the crisis counselor shares information with 911 that is crucial to saving the caller’s life.

How will 988 be funded?

Crisis services provided by Lifeline centers are funded through individual states. One aspect of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020 allows states to assess a fee on cell phone bills to recover the costs of the three-digit number and associated crisis services provided to individuals in crisis. Delaware is currently exploring such an option but no bills have been introduced. A similar fee on cell phone bills supports 911 in most states. Additional sources, including state general funds and federal funding are also used to fund 988.

Additional Resources

1. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (SAMHSA) <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/suicide-prevention/988-lifeline>
2. 988 Implementation Guidance Playbooks (SAMHSA and NASMHPD): Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs). <https://www.nasmhpd.org/content/988-implementation-guidance-playbooks>

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